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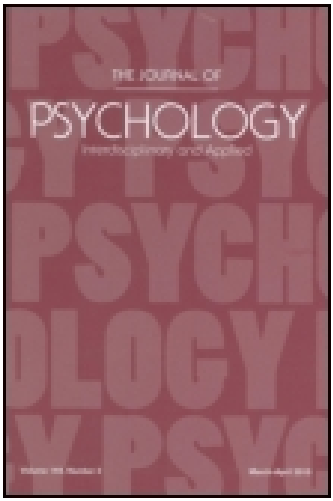

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Toward a Scientific Morality

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TOWARD A SCIENTIFIC MORALITY* [1]

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Many of us in the human sciences feel that we must assume our share of responsibility for the solution of problems we see reflected in the many varieties of group tension around us. Those of us who do feel this way are apt at the same time to feel frustrated because of our inability to make any demonstrable dent on the course of affairs. And many of us who share these feelings may not have adequately intellectualized to ourselves why it is that we believe we, as self-appointed experts on this thing called "human nature," are in a position to help decide what is "right" and what is "wrong."

The psychologist who takes it upon himself to study man in his social environment may in part avoid a feeling of helpless frustration if he gains some perspective on his rôle in the current world scene. And if he is to act with any degree of surety he must have some plausible and valid rationale to justify his assumption that he has something to contribute. We shall be concerned here, then, with these two problems: gaining perspective and pointing to a systematic basis for judging what is "good" and "bad" for man's nature.

A. MAN IN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

I can think of no better springboard for gaining some perspective on our own jobs as social scientist-citizens than to refer to the series of essays written by Julian Huxley. In his book *Evolution and Ethics,* he points out that "biological or organic evolution has at its upper end been merged into and largely succeeded by conscious or social evolution" (7, p. 122). He continues that "there are grounds for suspecting that biological evolution has come to an end, so far as any sort of major advance is concerned" (7, p. 123). The obvious conclusion, then, which this socially minded biologist draws is that "it is only through social evolution that the world-stuff can now realize radically new possibilities" (7, p. 123).

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[1]Excerpt from "The Development of a Scientific Morality," presidential address to the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Boston, September 6, 1948.

[2]Some of the points stressed here have been previously published (1, 2). I should like to express again here my indebtedness to Adelbert Ames, Jr., for stimulating discussions from which much included here emerged.

Huxley goes on to point out what the comparative psychologist would confirm, that man alone is the only part of the "world-stuff" where mental conflict is a normal and important part of life. Translating the implications of this statement into psychological terms, I should like to venture again the thesis that while all organisms appear to have an urge to live and grow, man's unique set of conflicts basically derive from a unique, emergent pattern of growth subjectively characterized by a desire for development.

Even though this hypothesis may seem quite fanciful to many psychologists, it is comforting to discover that it does not appear completely outrageous to a number of outstanding biologists. For example, C. Judson Herrick has written "the thing that is most distinctive about man is the pattern of his growth and the instrumentation of it by a rationally directed desire for improvement" (6). This emergent characteristic of man is, of course, enormously instrumented by man's unique higher mental processes, his use of symbols and concepts, his ability for rational thinking, intuition and foresight.

This unique pattern of man's growth constantly jeopardizes his security, creates frustration and necessitates choice. I submit that one of the most common denominators that runs through all of man's choices is the conflict between what we may call "security" including physical well-being ("form") on the one hand, and "development" ("flow") on the other. "Development" in the sense I am using it is possible only with the attainment of security, of some "form" in social life, the pursuit of knowledge and all cultural activities. The desire for improvement requires first of all that the organism have security. For there can be no direction unless we have a base from which to get direction. In terms of the way "security" is obtained in our culture today, this means a secure job, a decent standard of living, health and old-age benefits, etc.

It is a relatively simple matter to describe psychologically the way men in different societies learn to satisfy in derived ways the instinctual urges and tension systems that make for security, including physical well-being. It is also a relatively simple matter to account for the enormously varied ways of obtaining this security to be found in different cultural groups.

Current attempts to account for man's motivation solely in terms of the "reduction of tension" seem to me completely inadequate if we are going to "explain" the many situations in which men's satisfactions and happiness are actually related to an increase, not a decrease, in the state of "tension" such as exists, for example, when one undertakes a new task, strives to meet new levels of aspiration. No matter how much such theories are strained and

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enlarged, they somehow fail to bring in the pull of expectancies as well as the push of the existing "tensions." The only way out, I think, is to jump to a different, a "higher," order of accounting which must include man's desire to develop and his capacity to experience value-quality. Once this is done, "tension" can be understood, the "now" in which the organism finds itself can be seen as indissolubly related to the past and the future and clarification of the reasons for actions which seem to increase, rather than decrease, "tensions" become possible.

This is not the place to discuss this particular thesis at length. I can only indicate here my current feeling that man's characteristic pattern of growth, as laid down in his chromosome activity, constantly forces him to choose between various alternative possible courses of action. And concomitant with the development of the higher mental processes characteristic of man, there emergences the possibility of increased conflict as well as the possibility of increased conscious choice. And, as Huxley points out, the fact that man alone among all organisms is subject to mental conflict as a normal factor in life means that "the existence of this conflict is the necessary basis or ground on which conscience, the moral sense, and our systems of ethics grow and develop" (7, p. 2).

In other words, ethics and morality are emergent co-products of life when seen from the long perspective of evolution.

We must remember, of course, that ethics and morality emerge not only with the human species as such, but emerge afresh in each specific individual human being and that the code of ethics a particular human being acquires are relative to the group loyalties to which he is exposed and are dependent on the situation in which the child or the adult finds himself.

The social scientist must also remember that a system of ethics and a code of morality are not only emergent co-products of man's evolution but become themselves directive agencies in the evolutionary process itself. Huxley points out that "just as biological evolution was rendered both possible and inevitable when material organization became self-reproducing, so conscious evolution was rendered both possible and inevitable when social organization became self-reproducing" (7, p. 122). When that portion of the "world-stuff" we know as "man" emerged with its capacity to use concepts, to manipulate symbols, to communicate over a distance and to write its own history, then it also acquired the capacity to plan its own social and economic life for the future. It therefore acquired unique responsibility.

What this means, then, if we are to stick to a naturalistic explanation, is that a system of ethics, a code of morality is not something based on

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a priori generalizations, on casual speculations, or wish-fulfillments. It means that social scientists have a major responsibility in searching for the laws of the moral world just as physical scientists have searched for the laws of the physical world.

Causal relationships are inherent in all natural processes. If this were not so, then nature, including man and his social behavior, would be completely chaotic. Any system of ethics, any code of morality can have a scientific basis only in so far as we can arrive at causal explanations. In this connection we must remember that because two phenomena are related to each other there is not necessarily a causal connection between them. Many relationships are not causal. In a causal relationship there is always some effect determined by the intrinsic organization of the situation under observation.

The psychologist and the social scientist must also constantly bear in mind the fact that the material they deal with—the human organism in its social environment—is infinitely more complex than the material dealt with by the physical scientist. For example, a neurologist has pointed out that "our bodies think as naturally as they breathe and if we do not yet understand *how* we understand, the thing to do is to try to find out" (5, p. 40).

> The human brain is the most complicated structural apparatus known to science. If all the equipment of the telegraph, telephone, and radio of the North American continent could be squeezed into a half-gallon cup, it would be less intricate than the three pints of brain that fill your skull and mine. More than half of this brain tissue is cerebral cortex and parts immediately dependent upon it. The most ungifted normal man has twice as much of this matter tissue as the most highly educated chimpanzee (4, p. 107).

This fact can also comfort us for our lack of success as we grope always somewhat unsatisfactorily for causal explanations of human behavior. It is important to stress the complexity of the task facing the social scientist who searches for causal explanations, so he will be continually dissatisfied with any conceptual structure, any system of ethics, any code of morality, or any social organization based on any assumptions or condoning any practices which go against what facts we have to date about human nature and social relationships.

In other words, the multitude of factors inherent in any concrete human situation, in so far as they are known, must be taken into account and squarely faced by anyone who assumes the responsibility for molding social

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organizations or for making any pronouncements as to what is right and wrong, good or bad for human beings. But as the statement issued by the Preparatory Commission of the International Congress on Mental Health pointed out: "There is, however, all the difference between recognizing that a task has immense difficulties, and insisting that it is impossible" (8, p. 28).

So far we have pointed out that man seems to be the only organism in which conflict and choice in any moral sense are part of the normal processes of life. We have pointed out that man's mental capacities enormously increase the range of choice and at the same time impose on man the responsibility of guiding his own destiny. We have pointed out the possibility of creating a morality based on empirical evidence and that this is a job enormously complicated by the very nature of the material with which we deal. Our problem now is that of finding some toehold, some reference point upon which we can begin to build a scientific morality.

B. Perception and Value-Judgment

I submit that this reference point can be found in what we may call, for want of a better term, the phenomenon of value-judgment. Although any such term may be rejected by those who think science should not use words that have a philosophical ring, I believe the history of science would indicate that when value-judgments are excluded from science, any datum becomes inert and useless, any abstraction becomes futile and without functional significance.

From the point of view of the problem of morality we are considering here, it is noteworthy that biologists such as Huxley, Leo Loeb, J. B. S. Haldane, and others deliberately place values in the forefront of their thinking when they begin to discuss, as scientists, the implications of man's peculiar capacity for his continued social existence. To quote Huxley again: "We find values not merely emerging from the evolutionary process, but playing an active part in its latest phase; we know as an immediate and obvious fact that there are higher and lower values; we discover as a result of scientific analysis that there are more or less desirable or valuable directions in evolution" (7, p. 32).

Whether we like to admit it or not, nearly all of our experiences are tinged with a value-quality more or less intensely felt. Whether we like to admit it or not, the type of conflict that characterizes the human being is one he resolves by means of a value-judgment. Whether the scientist likes to admit it or not, any interpretation he makes is a value-judgment. And whether or not the psychologist likes to admit it, any psychology that does

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not include introspection and the analysis of one's own experience in making value-judgments is helplessly inadequate.

It is because of my own value-judgment that psychology has by now accumulated sufficient evidence relating to the nature of the process of value-judgment that I dare to discuss the development of a scientific morality. For it does seem to me that the psychologist who studies the experiencing organism can now feel equipped in a very modest way to throw some light on the nature of value-judgment and, through his knowledge of the process itself, reach certain conclusions as to what value-judgments are "good," what value-judgments are "bad." The psychologist, now, should be able to go a step further than do those who say that anything that promotes "higher values" such as knowledge, love, or beauty is ethically "right."

On the basis of evidence from experimental psychology, particularly the evidence from the phenomena revealed in the demonstrations of Adelbert Ames, Jr., of the Hanover Institute, I believe it is safe to say that every perception is in itself a value-judgment process. For it appears that even the simplest perception, for example the perception of a star point, depends upon a whole host of indications that are weighed and integrated to give us our final awareness. In most of our perceptions, of course, this weighing process goes on quite unconsciously. And as the stimuli from outside become more and more complicated, running for example from star points to lines to three dimensional objects to a newspaper headline or to participation in a race riot, the number of factors which must be integrated runs into many, many thousands. This weighing process is, of course, not only extremely complicated but it goes on in most cases with amazing rapidity.

The weighing process is the process of value-judgment and the end result is our perception, our attitude, our interpretation, in brief, the value-judgment we make.

It also seems to be a fact that perceptions are conceived and given birth to in purposeful action, that the weighing process, the process of value-judgment, goes on for a purpose, whether that purpose is seeking food, crossing a street, accepting some political ideology, or satisfying in any other way our desire for emergence and improvement.

All of our perceptions have in them implicitly an awareness of the probable consequences the externality related to a stimulus might have on our purposes if we should act to carry out those purposes. We test out our hunch of what the externality related to a stimulus really is, what it really means, through action. For nearly any given perception can be created by an infinite variety of external stimuli and we must learn the reliability of a perception through experiencing its consequences in action.

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If we don't act on our perceptions they become atrophied; if we do act on our perceptions, if our actions invariably meet with high success, they become enduring possibilities for choice. Perceptions which have given us a high prognosis for carrying out our purposes in the past provide us with a subjective feeling of surety, those which do not give us a high prognosis create lack of surety and anxiety.

The evidence from developmental, experimental, clinical, and social psychology indicates that one is only able to carry out his purposes by acquiring more accurate and effective perceptions through experiencing and resolving frustrations.

1. *Value-Quality*[3]

An individual's own awareness as to whether a perception is "right" or "wrong" is the value-quality an experience has for him and for him alone. The sense of the "higher" value-quality of one perception over another is due to the more reliable prognosis of the perception with the "higher" value-quality for carrying out a purpose. A hungry man may give up food that finally is within his grasp if, by so doing, he can relieve the hunger of a child; a research chemist may refuse a highly paid industrial position in favor of maintaining an academic position which he feels in the long run will further his own personal growth.

No amount of "logical reasoning" can act as a substitute for the judgment of what is "right" as given by the experienced value-quality of a perception. For logical reasoning does not take into account nearly as many factors as does a value-judgment. We are all aware, for example, of the difference in the behavior of someone whose good manners are "bred into him" and the behavior of someone who tries to do what is right by consciously following Emily Post.

2. *Our World of Assumptions*

A perception may be defined as an implicit awareness of the probable consequence an action might have for us with respect to carrying out some purpose that has value for us. Every perception is based on assumptions. These assumptions are largely unconscious and non-intellectual. They come into being in the process of adjustment and development. When taken together they constitute a person's assumptive world.

[3]The very brief discussions of "value-quality" and "our world of assumptions" are included here only to open up points of view that seem to have an intrinsic reasonableness in helping us understand social behavior. Although experimental work now in progress at The Hanover Institute and at Princeton seems to be turning up supporting scientific evidence for these formulations, the treatment here is in no sense meant to be inclusive or final.

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It has been pointed out above that the accuracy and effectiveness of our perceptions is only improved when we experience and resolve a frustration which has resulted from the inadequacy of a perception in providing an effective guide to action. Since the adequacy of perceptions is also determined by the nature of the assumptions on which they are based, and since these assumptions are generally unconscious and non-intellectual, instances constantly arise when our perceptions prove to be unreliable and "wrong," due to inadequate assumptions. We therefore face the problem, usually without being aware of it, as to whether our assumptions really are unreliable and wrong or whether they may not be reliable after all in terms of our long range purposes no matter how much we are temporarily frustrated, blocked, or disillusioned by specific experiences.

Here we are dealing essentially with a partial analysis of what is referred to as "faith." The greatness of individuals is known by history and less frequently by contemporaries in terms of their ability to weigh the ultimate reliability of these out-of-time-and-space assumptions against the momentary unreliability and reverses given by the here-and-now experiences. A common denominator of great political and religious leaders (a Lincoln or Lenin, Jesus or Gandhi) seems to be their capacity to make a value-choice in which more weight is given to the soundness of long range assumptions than to the frustration of immediate experience.

3. *Social Perception*

Before considering the implications of this interpretation of perception for the development of a scientific morality, it is necessary to say a word about what has been called "social perception." This term, used by Woodworth over two decades ago, has recently become very popular. I believe the term "social perception" can be a useful term for psychologists *if* they do not employ is loosely as a mere analogy and *if* they remember that in making a distinction between "perception" and "social perception," there is no implication whatever of any inherent difference between the underlying psychological principles involved.

The essential characteristic in any perception we may label "social" is that the situation giving rise to the stimulus includes other organisms with purposes of their own which have the potentiality of affecting our purposes and being affected by us. Since this potentiality is our own awareness, this means that the adequacy of our perception is dependent on our capacity to perceive and be aware of the purpose of other organisms.

We can label as "social perceptions" all those perceptions where there is

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the possibility of a mutual interaction of purposes. And although a "social perception" as used here has nothing to do with the inherent nature of the source of the stimulus as such, nevertheless, for most of us, what we can label our "social perceptions" involve other people whose purposes have a potential influence on our purposes while the carrying-out of our purposes has a potential influence on others.

Since man's specific purposes are largely derived from the group loyalties he acquires, what may be "social perceptions" for some people are not "social perceptions" for others. Ethnology is filled with examples.

Because social perceptions in this sense involve a potential reciprocal reaction of purposes, they are especially characterized by affective or emotional overtones.

Since the functional activity giving rise to what we label a "social perception" has an important characteristic or attribute not part of a "non-social perception," the content of those perceptions we may call "social" is likely to be of vastly more significance and importance to the social scientist and to the individual in his daily life than is the content of most "non-social perceptions."[4] Something new has been added—the potential purposes of something else that we must take into account in the weighing process that results in a value-judgment. This also means that a "social perception" generally has much greater complexity than a "non-social perception."

C. Judging What Is "Right"

From the point of view developed so far, any action can be called "right" if, through past experience, it has proved highly effective in carrying out a purpose, in checking a prognosis. It is imperative, however, to remember that because of the reciprocal influence of the purposes of one individual or group on the purposes of another individual or group, actions will prove effective in the long run only when the purposes common to individuals or individuals as members of groups are included in perception. Since perceptions are our own creations, we have the possibility and the opportunity of trying to make them efficient.

Although this is a pragmatic approach, it should be clear that this formulation so extends the consideration of what makes for effective action that

[4] If this formulation of the problem had been made in Külpe's time, I suspect we would be somewhat further along in our understanding of social behavior and might have been spared the artificial division that has so often separated "experimental" from "social" psychology and that has been reflected from time to time in a mutual lack of appreciation of the problem and research that constitute the other fellow's area.

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it is by no means synonymous to the pragmatism of James. "Effectiveness" of the type considered here is based on the emergence of value-quality which takes into account the community of human purposes. This completely rules out the effectiveness of a Mussolini, a Hitler, a ruthless (but "successful" in worldly terms) exploiter of human or natural resources.

If our actions consistently show that our perception is wrong, we may still, however, cling to these wrong perceptions, as we do with a prejudice or some other abstraction. The "right" perception, the one that gives higher prognosis, hasn't yet got "in" us—probably because the wrong perception hasn't sufficiently thwarted us in carrying out our purposes, or hasn't made us aware of the inadequacy of our underlying assumptions.

Sometimes these "wrong" perceptions actually appear to be helping us carry out some more deep-seated purposes—as with the anti-Semitism which was part of the Nazis' successful rise to power, the prejudices toward the Negroes of Southern whites who thereby maintain their position, etc. But "wrong" perceptions such as these which may be useful from the short-time point of view are bound to prove themselves false and to create difficulty from the long-time point of view. Continued experience will show that such perceptions have not included enough factors (viz. the purposes of others) to make them reliable prognoses. Attempts to stamp out Communism by legal means only, while doing too little, too late to remedy the conditions upon which Communism thrives, is a case in point.

However, it is apparently true that in all such cases, these "wrong" perceptions prevent the emergence of higher value-inquiry judgments that experientially accompany more advanced development of the pattern of growth. And, when these "wrong" perceptions do not take into account the purposes of other human beings, history shows that they inevitably breed frustration and counteraction which eventually forces an alteration, a correction of the perception. We are all familiar with studies which show that prejudices are dropped only when conflicting purposes evaporate, i.e., white troops during World War II were found to drop their Negro prejudices largely in so far as they fought side by side with Negro troops against a common enemy; there is a striking absence of labor-management disputes in the T.V.A. etc. In such instances there are clear common purposes, neither group sees the other as a threat to its own purposes.

One reason for the decline of certain institutions, ideologies, or groups is that they gradually or suddenly fail to provide individuals with potentialities for effective action in carrying out purposes; they out-live the original functions they served. For example, to the extent that the factor

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of action involved in the wisdom of the prophets is left out by organized and formalized religion, it fails to accomplish its professed purposes. And what is often described as the "poverty" of a civilization refers to that state of affairs where the values that characterize that civilization, the abstractions it sets as its goals or uses as its symbols, do not have the potentiality of being connected with action for carrying out the present emergent development. Likewise public "apathy" to problems experts may call "crucial" such, for example, as the control of atomic energy, can be accounted for by the fact that the average citizen even though quite aware of the dangers in the misuse of atomic power, sees no effective way in which he can act to do anything about the existing situation.

A criterion for social change should be that it provides the possibility of acquiring non-conflicting loyalties. For if individual purposes and group, class, or national purposes do not include the purposes of other individuals, groups, classes or nations, conflict is inevitable. Hence all reform, social changes, artistic expressions, etc., that will prove to be springboards for further developments and not mere compromises, blind alleys, or cruel illusions will be those that provide the potentiality for development though action of all human beings, not for any one special group, race, nation, class, etc.

The "morality" or "ethical" nature—the correctness or rightness—of any action, then, is to be judged in terms of the degree to which it includes and integrates the purposes and provides for the potential development of those purposes of all other people concerned in the action or possibly affected by it. In this way, the "effectiveness" of an action and its inclusion of a common denominator of relevant purposes becomes inseparable. Emerging personal goals must be in harmony with emerging social goals while still emerging on the concrete individual level. From this point of view, the "rightness" or "morality" of an action becomes inseparable from its effectiveness. This is essentially the ethics of all great prophets with their emphasis on charity.

Individual liberty for men in any group or society, then, means that they must acquire overlapping rather than divergent or conflicting loyalties to those persons they are dependent on. For under modern conditions of living our independence increases with our interdependence.

But this does not imply blind tolerance. Tolerance is a virtue very likely to defeat itself. We are likely to be tolerant only when we are ignorant of what is the right thing to do. Tolerance must not be confused with charity which is a willingness to take account of the other fellow's purposes.

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What I am saying, simply, is that "what is right" means what is right for man's nature. This is not compromise which always involves some submergence, but growth through a non-conflicting interaction of purposes.

1. *Change*

We must also remember that no matter what code of morality we might work out today on the basis of all evidence at hand, this code should itself never be considered as static or fixed. There are no fixed prescriptions.

Many of you will remember the story of the ancient king who in his last years called together his three wise men and told them he wanted an epitaph that could be chiseled on his stone tomb and would consist of a statement which would forever be true. After long counsel the wise men reported back to their king with the recommendation that he have on his tomb the phrase "Everything changes." It is a most encouraging sign to see that the report of the Preparatory Commission of the International Mental Health Congress takes full cognizance of this fact.

Any viable system of ethics must be so designed that it will not only be sensitive to change but will provide for change. For to be set against change is to go against all the rules of nature and of human nature. Nothing in nature is static and least of all, apparently, anything man has any connection with. Through his discoveries and his technological improvements man is always transforming the world around him.

Anyone who argues for the return of the good old days or who expects life and the world to somehow settle down to a determined form is completely unrealistic, not plugged in to concreteness. Those prophets of doom whom we encounter in every generation are essentially people who are unable to accept the fact that the world is changing because the world created by their assumptions is a static one. What my Princeton predecessor, J. M. Baldwin, many years ago called "the dialectic of personal growth" is constantly going on with new emerging social conditions creating new value-experiences for the individual and forcing him to new value-judgments. It should also be pointed out that the process of evolution, including social evolution, is essentially a one-way street. There is no going back to an earlier set of conditions.

At the present time it is quite clear that we are in what Huxley has called "a rudimentary and make-shift stage of social evolution" (7, p. 135 f.). The assumptive worlds most of us live in are pragmatic approximations not necessarily consistent with effective long range action. Hence they can retard

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the emergence of more adequate perceptions with a higher prognostic reliability and a higher, experiential value-quality.

2. *The Rôle for the Social Scientist*

There is no fundamental difference in the process of value-judgment or interpretation between the physical scientist and the social scientist whether they deal with atoms, nerve conduction, or everyday social behavior. The difference between them is merely a difference in the complexity of the value-judgment process required in reaching higher order abstractions or explanations.

There can be no such thing as "impartiality" for any social scientist who is in the stream of things, any more than there can be pure "objectivity" for any scientist who is more than a recorder. Any interpretation is a value-judgment and any pretense of impartiality is more than likely to lead only to social irresponsibility.

Since the social scientist is likely to be criticized by those whose purposes differ from his own, it is particularly essential for him to try to include his own purposes as well as the purposes of the people he is analyzing as conscious factors in his value-judgments. And since it can be the responsibility of social scientists to make value-judgments concerning what social action is "right" and what social action is "wrong," it must also be their responsibility as scientists to be as sure as they can that their value-judgments are really based on all the knowledge of human nature available to them.

If this knowledge includes the facts concerning the nature of perception and value-judgment something more than mere amendments to present formulations will be required. The social scientist today, I believe, should try to accomplish a radical shift in his thinking. Real progress in any science comes not merely by "adding to" existing knowledge but by becoming aware of our assumptive worlds, conscious of their inadequacy, destroying and disintegrating them, and then rebuilding them in the constant search for more adequate formulations.

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